

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-9 (cancelled)

Claims 10-12 (withdrawn from consideration)

Claim 13 (cancelled)

Claims 14-16 (withdrawn from consideration)

Claim 17 (cancelled)

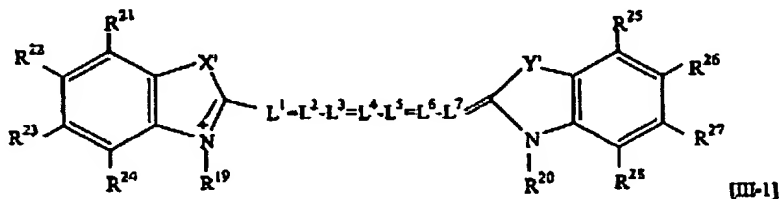
Claims 18-20 (withdrawn from consideration)

Claims 21-24 (cancelled)

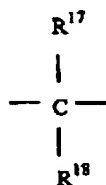
Claim 25 (withdrawn from consideration)

Claims 26-28 (cancelled)

29. (new): A sodium salt of a compound of formula III-1 having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule

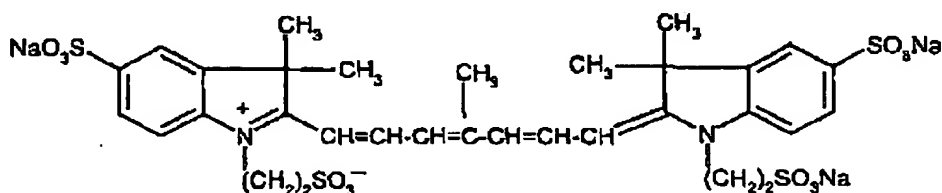


wherein L^1-L^7 are the same or different and each is substituted or unsubstituted methine and L^4 is methine substituted by alkyl having 1 to 4 carbon atoms, R^{19} and R^{20} are lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms and are substituted by a sulfonic acid group, $R^{21}-R^{28}$ are the *new limitation* same or different and each is a hydrogen atom, a sulfonic acid group, a carboxyl group, a hydroxyl group, an alkyl(sulfoalkyl)amino group, a bis(sulfoalkyl)amino group, a sulfoalkoxy group, a (sulfoalkyl)sulfonyl group or a (sulfoalkyl)aminosulfonyl group, and X' and Y' are the same or different and each is a group of the formula



wherein R^{17} and R^{18} are unsubstituted lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms.

Claim 30 (new): The sodium salt of claim 29 having the formula



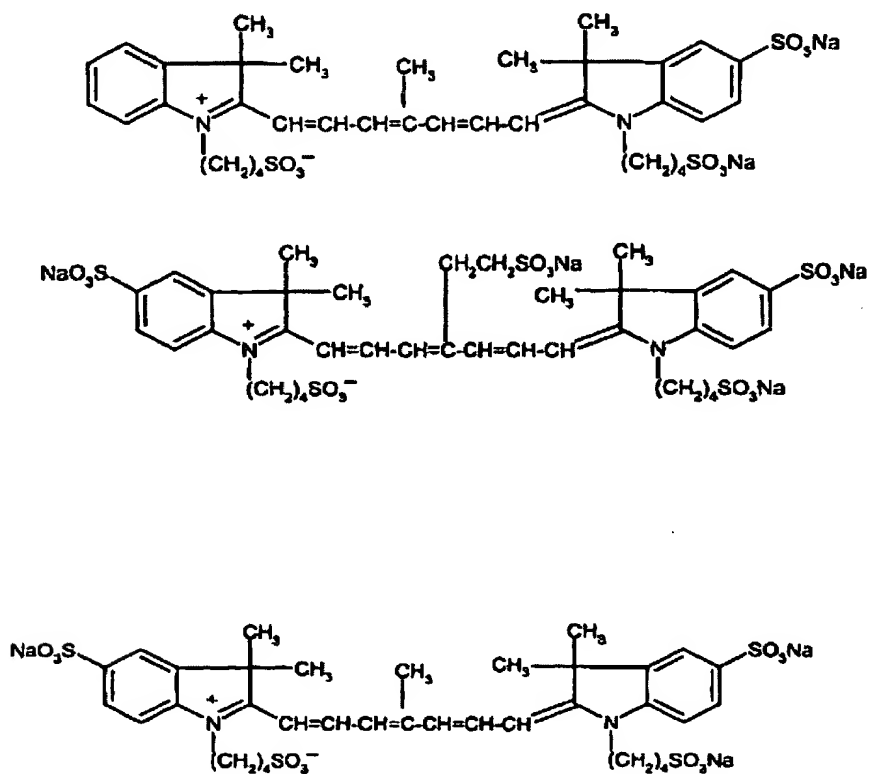
Claim 31 (new): A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising the sodium salt of claim 29.

Claim 32 (new): A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising the sodium salt of claim 31.

Claim 33 (new): The infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 31, for tumor imaging.

Claim 34 (new): The infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 31, for angiography.

Claim 35 (new): The sodium salt of claim 29, wherein said sodium salt is



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